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## LOVE IN MEDIÆVAL ROMANCE

Now of wemen this I say for me,  
Of erthly thingis nane may bettir be ;  
They suld haif wirschep and grit honoring  
Off men, aboif all vthir erthly thing.

These words of the Scottish poet Dunbar, written at the close of the Middle Ages, express the cult of woman-worship which the chivalry of the Middle Ages had developed and which through the medium of romantic love in novel, poem, and romance has meant so much to the life of our own time. For however fundamental and unchanging the love of the sexes may be, there surely is no doubt that it is colored and even modified by ideals that are in the atmosphere, that its manner of expression in outward life is affected by them, and that poetry and story have really changed men's ways of thinking of love and even of loving. Of the various tendencies which combine in modern love-literature, mediæval chivalry is one of the most important, and I shall point out a few of the characteristics of chivalric love as revealed in the romances of the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries.

It is to France that we owe our greatest debt—France the centre of mediæval culture, combining many complex elements from Latin and Celtic and Germanic worlds in ways yet mysterious to the historian, evolving from these combinations new products and new types in literature and in thought, and passing them on to other countries, especially to England and Germany, to aid in the growth of culture there. This explanation is made so that the reader will understand that the romantic material with which I am dealing is international, with France as the centre, although I shall refer chiefly to the imitative literature of England.

It must be made clear first of all, however, that in mediæval literature there are as many ways of treating love as in modern literature, and that even in romantic literature there are great differences. The meaning of chivalric love will be somewhat plainer if the other types are explained. It should be borne in mind, moreover, that the writer does not claim a very close

relation between the type of love found in literature and the love in the actual life of the Middle Ages. Here we are dealing chiefly with love in literature, and references to life will be made to interpret so far as possible the literary material. Three distinct ways of treating love may be found, each of them strikingly interesting, and each of them belonging to a more or less distinct type of literature. I shall begin with the lower type of love and proceed to the higher rather than attempt the more difficult task of taking up the literary types in the doubtful order of their appearance.

First of all is the love of the *fabliau*. To the reader unfamiliar with mediæval literature it should be explained that the *fabliau* is an amusing story in metrical form, usually coarse in content, resembling not a little the anecdotes which form a staple part of the conversation of groups of men in the country store, in the harvest field during the rest period, and in a thousand other places where men find themselves in companies. This kind of vulgarity in the Middle Ages found its way into literature and furnished material for Boccaccio and Chaucer. In the *fabliau* woman is the daughter of Eve, the source of most of the mischief in the world, loquacious, meddling, faithless, sensual. Desire is the nearest approach to love. Many of the *fabliaux* are satirical, with a purpose more or less moral. According to them, to quote from Chauntecleer,—

In principio  
Mulier est hominis confusio.

The Host of the *Canterbury Tales* draws a characteristic moral after hearing the Merchant tell the *fabliau* of January and May:—

Lo, whiche sleightes and subtiltees  
In wommen been! for ay as bisy as bees  
Been they us sely men for to deceyve.

In the tale of *The Dumb Wife*, in which a dumb woman gains the power of speech at the desire of her husband, is one of the mildest of the jests characteristic of the *fabliau*:—

The leist deuill that is in hell  
Can gif ane wyf his tounge;  
The grittest, I you tell,  
Cannot do mak hir dum.

In the *fabliau*, then, we have the lowest possible type of love—sensuality mingled with contempt.

As we shall see farther on, chivalric love owes a great deal to the church. Strangely enough, the *fabliau* attitude toward women also received a great deal of encouragement from the ascetic element in Mediæval Catholicism, which distrusted women and held them to be the main source of all evil. Mediæval ecclesiastical writers who saw no kinship between human and divine love and were acquainted with the evil physical consequences of violent passion even went so far as to regard love of woman as a disease. To a certain extent Oriental contempt for women may be another influence, since some of the stories satirizing women (in the *Seven Sages*, for instance) are certainly Oriental. But the supposition that all *fabliaux* came from India or other parts of the Orient seems effectually disproved. Historically, of course, asceticism owes a great deal to the East, and tendencies to scorn the weaker sex no doubt received encouragement from the Orient in various ways, but the *fabliau* attitude is too nearly universal to be regarded as either Oriental or Occidental. However, the character of the *fabliau* owes a great deal to the audience which listened to them. They were primarily masculine and *bourgeois*. No doubt many knights in hours of relaxation were entertained by the stories of the *bourgeois* classes, for the differences in culture were not necessarily very great; but the *fabliau* was not recognized as a literary form of any dignity, and it was not meant to appeal to the courtly classes.

A brief statement of the content of one of the most famous of the *fabliaux*—the *Lai d'Aristote*—will emphasize these characteristics. Alexander of Greece, after subjugating India, neglected to pursue his conquests because of his love for a beautiful captive. Aristotle, his teacher, a bald old philosopher, reproved him, and the king promised amendment. But the mistress noticed the sadness in the king's manner, and extracted from him the secret of it. She vowed vengeance on the old philosopher. At dawn she placed Alexander before a window in a tower overlooking the garden. A seductive song touched the master's heart and brought him to the coquettishly attired

young lady, whom he addressed in the conventional language of the mediæval lover, offering for her service body and soul, life and honor. She asked him to comply with one of her whims, and Aristotle readily consented. The old philosopher was saddled and bridled like a horse, and the young lady mounted him. At this critical moment Alexander made himself visible. In an instant the teacher perceived the trick.

"Sire," he said, "was I not right in fearing the effects of love upon you, who are in the bloom of youth, since it has thus accoutred me, who am old? I have joined example to precept."

As has been indicated, the *fabliau* is pretty distinct from romance, though the distinction is not always strictly observed. The second type of love is found in a literary form which may with justice be regarded as romantic, though it is a distinct type of romance and has some of the qualities of the epic, and in French literature, but not in English, is usually regarded as a literary species. This is the *chanson de geste*, the literary species of which the *Song of Roland* is the most distinguished representative. As the name indicates, it is concerned with deeds; it is historical or pseudo-historical, and in its typical form is concerned with the family of Charlemagne, their vassals, and their enemies. As in the case of the *Song of Roland*, these poems often deal with the relations of Christendom to the Saracens. In date they are generally earlier than the pure romances, though the two literary forms exist side by side for a considerable period. War is always of great importance,—not the adventures of single knights so much as those of great armies. Whatever the origin of these *chansons de geste* (a problem not yet solved), it is clear that they represent a fairly simple and primitive mind, that they are intended neither for a courtly society nor for a very humble or even *bourgeois* society, and that they are primarily for men.

In the *chanson de geste* women are almost always in the background; but love becomes increasingly important—often love between a Christian knight and a Saracen maiden. In these romances, both in French and in English, love is curiously conventionalized, in a way that is very distant from any normal condition in actual life. The love is extremely

passionate, irresistible, animal, but also sometimes noble, and usually not degrading. However, the extraordinary feature of this type of love is that the woman woos. This fact does not imply any superiority on the part of woman; rather the contrary, for the knight is sometimes as disdainful, at first, as is the lady of chivalric romance. Although it is perhaps not unnatural for the Christian writer to attribute unwomanly boldness to Saracen women, he apparently gives it his approval by awarding success to her love when she consents to become a Christian in order to possess her lover. Moreover, she becomes, usually, an exemplary and even heroic wife. Orable, the wife of William of Orange, appearing in several *chansons de geste* dealing with that hero, is one of these overbold maidens, but as a wife she is the most attractive, most faithful, and most heroic woman in the whole range of Charlemagne literature and one of the finest women in all mediæval literature. In explaining this type of literature I shall take two examples, both in English romances which have French analogues.

The first is from *Beves of Hamtoun*. Sir Beves, after a narrow escape from death at the hands of mother and step-father, was sold as slave to the Saracen king of Ermonie. The king had a daughter, Josian, who learned to love the attractive stranger. After a battle in which Beves saved her from a forced marriage, she entertained him in her chamber. This opportunity she used to speak of her love in very gross language. But Beves bluntly refused her proposals, and as a consequence was cursed roundly. He resented her language, declared his intention to go to another country, and took lodging for the night away from the palace in the town. There he was visited first by the chamberlain of the princess and then by the princess herself. When Beves heard Josian, he pretended to be asleep.

"Awake, dear one," she called, "awake. I am come to make peace."

"Damsel," replied Beves, "go away and leave me. I have fought for you, and will do nothing more."

Josian fell down and wept sorely.

"Mercy," she cried. "Men say that a woman's bolt is soon shot. If you will forgive me for what I did, I will forsake my false gods for Christianity."

"In that case," quoth the knight, "I grant it, my sweet one."

Whereupon he kissed her in token of the agreement.

It is characteristic of the *chanson de geste* type that conversion because of a very physical passion is just as efficacious as conversion because of religious conviction. Consequently, Josian was an ideally faithful wife and Christian from that moment.

In *Beves* the feminine approach is somewhat grosser than it is possible to make appear in a summary. In the second example, however,—from *Sir Ferumbras*—no summary can conceal the underlying brutality. In a battle with the Saracens, Oliver the famous friend of the more famous Roland, with a few French knights, were taken prisoner. By the orders of the emir, Balan, they were bound, thrown into prison, and left without food. Floripas, daughter of the emir, hearing their cries, went to learn the cause. Having learned that one of the Christian knights was very handsome, she demanded permission to speak with them. The jailer refused. The maiden then attempted to force the prison door, and the jailer, resisting, had his brains knocked out by the determined lady. She then released the prisoners and concealed them in her chamber on the condition that they should help her to marry Guy of Burgundy, whom she had once seen and had since loved.

Soon messengers came from Charlemagne to the emir to demand the release of the prisoners. The messengers were seized by the enraged emir, but Floripas succeeded in taking them also to her chamber. Among the new prisoners were Roland and Guy of Burgundy. When the lady jailer made known her wishes, Roland suggested that Guy take the maiden. But Guy declined to do so before he had the assent of King Charles. When the maiden understood, she went almost mad with rage, and swore by Mahomet that unless Guy took her as his wife all of them should hang. This vigorous persuasion was successful. Floripas and Guy were betrothed, and the Saracen maiden announced her readiness to be baptized. In the war between the emir and the Christians which followed, Floripas aided her new friends energetically. The emir was captured, at last, and the Christians, including Ferumbras, the emir's son and the brother of

Floripas, endeavored to gain his consent to baptism—all except Floripas, who took little interest in these attempts at conversion, declaring that they would fail. To Charlemagne she said: “Sir Emperor, you do wrong in delaying for his sake. You had done well to slay him last night when he was taken.” And slain he was, whereupon Floripas joyfully married her lover.

The fact that women of this type are not exceptional, but are conventional in a literature of wide range, while it probably indicates little as to actual practices, throws an interesting light on the tastes of mediæval audiences. In English romances of the most popular type they exist well through the Middle Ages. Appearing in a literature almost contemporary with chivalric romances, the love elements stand a world removed. As indicated, the explanation must be in the primitive nature of the material which produced the type, the crudeness of the hearers who listened to them as they fell from the lips of the wandering minstrel, and the tendency of a literary convention, once established, to maintain itself without apparent justification.

The third type of love, the chivalric, embraces several varieties, but all of them agree in placing woman upon a pedestal. No longer is she a daughter of Eve, the cause of the evil in men’s hearts. Now she is a sister of Mary, object of man’s highest aspiration, and the best earthly symbol of divine love. The contrast with the love of the *fabliau* and the *chanson de geste* is startling, but there is a partial explanation at hand. With the advance of the Middle Ages, wealth increased, a tendency to display developed, and with wealth and display came luxury. The court became the centre of a certain culture; there was leisure and the desire for entertainment; princes could afford to employ others to entertain; and the court poets and minstrels became important in consequence. But it was not the prince, usually more or less concerned with the problem of self-preservation or of aggrandizement, who had real leisure; it was the wife. Without the means of intercourse which brings equals of every rank together in later society, she interested herself in the entertainment of the court, became the centre of



the life of the entertainers, and their mistress. The natural result of this association between refined women and refined men of lower rank than the women was a feminized literature—a literature for women, adapted to the emotions of women, and consequently idealizing women. Many other elements, some of which we shall notice, enter into this new attitude, but the general social situation indicated must have been fundamental.

First of all I shall discuss briefly an aspect of the subject which is important, indeed, but which is so well known that I desire to emphasize other aspects that have not been so clearly and emphatically stated. Mediæval romantic love became, in its ideal relation, an affair between a married woman and an unmarried man. The reason for this fact has often been stated as lying in the social situation already indicated. Husbands were not chosen, as a rule, because love sprang up between knight and maiden, but for political reasons. Was it not to be expected that the wife who had been sacrificed for the welfare of family should seek the love of men other than her husband, especially since, as a wife, she had gained a liberty and an authority unknown in the parental home? This reason was unquestionably present, but it was not the only reason. The whole tendency of mediæval thought and feeling encouraged this kind of love, and it was a natural outgrowth of a chivalrous attitude toward women. The central institution of the Middle Ages was the church, and the church, with all its practical power, rested on the theory that this world is secondary and unreal, that it is in some sense a symbol of another world which is the supreme reality. The theory permeated mediæval life in various directions, and it profoundly affected the love of the sexes.

The existence of an influence in the opposite direction—that is, from the secular to the religious—is of course well known. Mystical love of the divine, of Jesus or of Mary, often had the mode of expression and even the quality of sexual love. Catherine of Siena was betrothed to the Lord with ring and vow. Suso, in petitioning Our Lady, imitated the wooing of Suabian young men. The passion of the mediæval female mystic for Christ often strangely resembles human love, Christ the lover to

whom the woman yields herself. The symbolism of union with the divine is at times very realistic. The following passage from the well-known "Wooing of our Lord"—a prayer written for the use of a woman, probably a nun—is typical: "Jesus, sweet Jesu, thus thou foughtest for me against thy soul's foes; thou didst settle the contest for me with thy body, and madest of me, wretch, thy beloved and spouse. Thou hast brought me from the world into the bower of thy birth, enclosed me in thy chamber where I may so sweetly kiss and embrace thee, and of thy love have spiritual delight." To what extent this passion is a transformed human passion it is hard to say. A recent writer on mysticism, denying the identity of the human with the divine passion, at the same time clearly indicates the character of the resemblance. "The mystic's outlook . . . is the lover's outlook. It has the same element of wildness, the same quality of selfless and quixotic devotion, the same combination of rapture and humility. This parallel is more than a pretty fancy: for mystic and lover, upon different planes, are alike responding to the call of the Spirit of Life. The language of human passion is tepid and insignificant beside the language in which mystics try to tell the splendours of their true love. They force upon the unprejudiced reader the conviction that they are dealing with an ardour far more burning for an object far more real."<sup>1</sup> Now this parallelism between mystical love of God and sexual love is universal. But is it without significance that the parallelism is most marked in chivalric love, developing at a period when mysticism had a powerful hold on the church and the world? That is, may not the human passion have borrowed from the divine?

Take the love of Dante, for instance,—a love thoroughly typical of the age of chivalry and the courts of love. After his meeting with Beatrice when he was about nine years old, she immediately became the centre of his life, not only while she lived but, it is supposed, as long as the poet lived. There is no indication that he ever thought of marrying her. Yet he sought opportunities to see her for his soul's nourishment, and she be-

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<sup>1</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (New York, 1911,) pp. 106 f.

came the symbol of love and finally of divine faith. It is usually believed that this is a human love, and a very real human experience. Yet the emotions described are not distinguishable from the emotions of the mystic yearning for God.

Beyond the sphere which spreads to widest space  
 Now soars the sigh that my heart sends above ;  
 A new perception born of grieving Love  
 Guideth it upward the untrodden ways.  
 When it hath reached unto the end, and stays,  
 It sees a lady round whom splendors move  
 In homage ; till, by the great light thereof  
 Abashed, the pilgrim spirit stands at gaze.  
 It sees her such, that when it tells me this  
 Which it hath seen, I understand it not,  
 It hath a speech so subtile and so fine.  
 And yet I know its voice within my thought  
 Often remembereth me of Beatrice :  
 So that I understand it, ladies mine.<sup>2</sup>

In the case of Dante it can scarcely be doubted that the human love, in becoming the symbol of divine love, undergoes some changes in quality, and this change in quality enters more or less into the character of all chivalric love.

In this connection it is perhaps not without significance that in allegorizing human love, mediæval love goes to the church for some of its most important symbols. The most conventional of all the symbols is the mediæval court of love, with a castle for location, and the procedure more or less legal in character. In the court of love poetry, the judge is sometimes an actual sovereign—for example, Marie of Champagne—who decides some delicate point of love which is argued before her, as, for instance, whether there could be true love between husband and wife, which Marie of Champagne was said to have decided in the negative. This legal procedure becomes sometimes more or less religious or ecclesiastical. A temple takes the place of the castle; an altar replaces the throne; prayers are uttered, incense burned, and offerings made. Of course the classical cult of Venus was influential in this secular poetry, but as a matter of fact the manner of worship was essentially the same as for the Virgin Mary. The lady who was the object of worship was

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<sup>2</sup>From Rossetti's translation of *The New Life*.

adored in the same religious phraseology very often. Andrew the Chaplain tells of a Paradiso, a Purgatorio, and an Inferno of lovers; there are love-visions evidently modeled on the visions of ecclesiastical literature; there are confessions, paternosters, credos, masses, pilgrimages, even a cloister of love, all revealing the close relation of religious and the secular modes of interpreting and expressing love.<sup>3</sup>

A question already mentioned is of the greatest importance—that is, To what extent does the human love of the romances actually partake of the qualities of divine love? Anything like a complete answer is of course impossible. The necessity of humility and absolute submission on the part of the lover to one who is above law has already been suggested. When Lancelot, pursuing Guinevere and a treacherous knight who had forcibly abducted her, hesitated for a moment to perform an action regarded as degrading to a knight—mounting a cart with a churl—even the rescue of the queen did not save him from reproach and estrangement. On another occasion a word from the queen caused Lancelot to allow inferior knights to get the better of him. When Ivain forgot to return to his Laudine by the appointed day, he was punished by years of separation and madness. When Lanval mentioned his happy love for a fairy mistress, against her desire, he immediately suffered loss of her love and great danger of death. In the last case the superiority of the lady may seem to lie in the fact that she is queen in an “other-world,” but the attitude is the same in the case of mistresses in “this world.” Disobedience to the deity is punished scarcely more severely.

Another point in which chivalrous love resembles mystical love is that ideally it is a pursuit of something unattainable,—

“The desire of the moth for the star,  
Of the night for the morrow,  
The devotion to something afar  
From the sphere of our sorrow.”

It is this quality which gives charm to the love of Dante, of Petrarch, and of many a troubadour for his mistress. Marriage

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<sup>3</sup> This point is discussed in Neilson's *The Origins and Sources of the Court of Love* and in Dodd's *Courtly Love in Chaucer and Gower*.

means attainment and the death of love. Therefore the best love is the love for one who is most nearly unattainable—the wife of another. Of course the ideal breaks down, and indirectly leads to immorality, but it is not without elevation and charm. The emotion, instead of leading to pursuit and conquest, leads to sympathy and help for all womankind, a dauntless, if quixotic, courage on the battlefield, and a refinement of the whole nature of the lover. Even in the case of Lancelot, love has this quality of longing which cannot be satisfied, and this is transformed into great deeds. In Ector's last tribute to his brother, it is love which is made the central fact of his character:—

“Thou, Sir Launcelot, there thou liest; . . . thou were the courtliest knight that ever bore shield; and thou were the truest friend to thy lover that ever bestrode horse; and thou were the truest lover of a sinful man that ever loved woman; . . . and thou were the meekest man and gentlest that ever sat in hall among ladies; and thou were the sternest knight to thy mortal foe that ever put spear in the rest.”

The mystical, contemplative quality of sexual love, making it resemble love of the divine, is perhaps the most striking evidence of relation between the two. In some cases this contemplation meant only a fixed concentration of the mind on divine things. Similar contemplation on the part of lovers is to be expected. But sometimes contemplation meant being rapt into an ecstasy which shut out the realization of ordinary events. Even this kind of contemplation is not absent from the romances. Passages relating to two of the greatest of the Arthurian heroes will perhaps be sufficient to make the point clear. But first, as an example of divine contemplation, take the following from Bonaventura's *Life of St. Francis*:—

“Toward the Sacrament of the Lord's Body he felt a glowing devotion that consumed the very marrow of his bones, marvelling with utmost amazement at that most loving condescension and condescending love. Oft did he communicate, and so devoutly as to render others devout, while, as he tasted of the sweetness of that Lamb without spot, he became like one inebriated in spirit and rapt out of himself in ecstasy.”

The first example of the ecstasy of human love which has this trance-like quality is in *Lancelot of the Laik*. Lancelot, just released from prison, went to the battle between the forces of Arthur and those of Galiot clad in red armor and mounted on a red horse. From the sides of the river where he halted he beheld Queen Guinevere watching the scene from a parapet. When the battle began, the red knight sat motionless on his steed, buried in the thought of his unfortunate love. A herald came, seized his bridle, and cried, "Awake! It is no time to sleep." But Lancelot did not reply, "so pricked him the smart of heaviness that stood unto his heart." Then came two discourteous men, of whom one took his shield from his neck, and the other threw water into the ventail. The cold water caused him to wink, and he aroused himself for the conquest.

The second example is taken from a romance of Chrétien de Troyes. One snowy morning Perceval, having risen early, saw a falcon strike a bird, wounding it. When he had ridden to the spot, he saw on the white snow three drops of blood. Leaning on his lance, he gazed on the dots of red, which reminded him how the red lay on the white in his beloved's face. The morning passed, but the knight did not move. Finally some squires of Arthur's retinue, which was encamped near by, noticed him and called the attention of the king. Arthur bade one of his knights bring the stranger to him. But Perceval did not heed the messenger's greeting. The knight, angered, charged the motionless stranger, shouting to him to defend himself. Perceval was aroused in time to throw the discourteous knight to the ground. Then Kay went to bring the stranger, who was again lost in his reverie, called to him roughly, and was punished even more severely than the first knight. Perceval immediately returned to the spots of blood, over which he leaned on his lance as he gazed, utterly heedless of his wounded opponent. Finally Gawain undertook the dangerous task. When he arrived at the spot where Perceval was leaning on his lance, two of the drops had been dissolved by the sun and the third was diminishing. Consequently the dreamer responded immediately to Gawain's courteous greeting: "Here were two, who would have forced me away, while I was taken up with a thought that gave me

delight; they who wished to rob me found not their gain; here were three drops of blood that adorned the white snow; as I gazed, it seemed to me I beheld the fresh color on the face of my fair friend."

This mystical, worshiping, contemplative love had its source in part, no doubt, in the social circumstances already mentioned; and because of a more quickly developing culture and perhaps of warmer blood, or even perhaps of contact with Arabian literature, it arose first in southern France, whence it spread to northern France, England, Italy, and Germany. But besides the social conditions, there are three cultural elements which enter into mediæval chivalric love as it has been preserved in the romances.

The tendency to an idealistic, fanciful love which social conditions encouraged found ample and adaptable material in Celtic story. The French came in contact with the Celts both in England and in Brittany, and the result of this contact was the infusion of a great mass of Celtic story into French literature. Coming first in the form of short narrative poems, its influence spread until almost all romance was colored by it, and the Arthurian legend, with its boundless wealth of story and elusive charm, was fully developed. Celtic stories were strangely fantastic, fanciful, remote; they were full of the supernatural, making communication between this world and other worlds easy, and recognizing love relations between mortals and fairies. They were full of color, of action, of magic, of weirdness, and of poetic charm. Of course they were pagan.

In spite of the fact that the church was not always friendly to this Arthurian material, in one respect this importation was too nearly akin to mediæval ideals not to be of literary use. In a world which believed so intensely in an unseen reality more real than the visible world, and which recognized influences from one to the other to be frequent and potent in affairs, the easy communication of mortal and immortal in Celtic fairy-lore furnished the best of material for religious elaboration. The consequence was the development of the legends of Perceval, Galahad, and the Grail, full of strange, Celtic, yet Christian yearning and beauty; the ideal lover of woman became the

ideal lover of good; and the quester for the sake of a beloved mistress became the loyal quester for a romantic, ideal goal, the essence of which was probably a religious emotion, for the sake of God.

In a precisely parallel manner Celtic lore contributed to the literature of mediæval love. The love which found in woman the goal of a strange, mystical, hopeless yearning found nourishment in the lore which showed best how the remote could be vested with the greatest mystical charm. It furnished material in the stories of the strange, dangerous, and ever-fascinating love of mortal for immortal, with which to picture ideally the love of mortal for mortal, and consequently the great mediæval love stories, rising to the loves of Tristram and Iseult, of Lancelot and Guinevere, are Celtic in origin.

Another element, not less potent, probably, was Platonism. Platonic influence has been so much associated with the Renaissance that we sometimes forget that it was very powerful through the entire Middle Ages. Not directly, of course; but indirectly through Neo-Platonism, the church fathers, the early mediæval philosophers, and the earlier and later mystics. In the early Middle Ages, in fact, it was the Platonic, not the Aristotelian, strain of culture which prevailed. And long after the Aristotelian philosophers had replaced the Platonic, the influence of Platonism and its Neo-Platonic offspring was evident in the spiritual life of the intelligent world. The universality of the influence of *The Consolation of Philosophy* of Boethius would alone go far toward accounting for the continued vogue of this mystical philosophy; and Dionysius the Areopagite, St. Augustine, Scotus Erigena, and many others also carried on the tradition. Platonism re-enforced the tendency of the Middle Ages to regard the unseen as of supreme importance in comparison with the world of sense. To put the meaning of mediæval Platonism as simply as possible, it was that whatever of good there is in the world is good because it partakes of divine good; that whatever there is of evil is evil because it lacks this divine character, that is, is purely earthly. Thus, as brought out by Plato himself and the Platonists of the Renaissance, earthly beauty is a kind of reflection of the divine or perfect beauty, and love of earthly beauty in woman may be



an education which will enable the lover eventually to see beyond the earthly to the divine and perfect beauty.<sup>4</sup>

But more important than any theory of relation between human and divine love was the character of the love of the divine. For the divine perfection could be known truly only by mystic contemplation and love. As we have already seen, this love of the unseen, imaginatively realized in Christ or Mary or some one of the saints, assumed the character of human love of the higher type. The two kinds of love being thus related in quality, it is not strange that love of woman should assume, in literature at least, something of the quality which seems peculiar to love of the divine. The lady becomes a being to be worshipped. The lover does not *realize* her human imperfections; she seems rather a perfect being created by love and meaningless apart from love. She becomes real only by falling below the ideal of this love, as does Guinevere. But in chivalric love at its best the physical element is absolutely subject to the spiritual. Platonism has evidently contributed to this ethereal human love as it has contributed to many other elements of mediæval life. This statement, of course, does not imply that the writers of romance were conscious Platonists.

The third element to which I referred cannot be separated entirely from the second, to which and to related tendencies it owes its existence. I mean the cult of the Virgin Mary. The adoration of the Virgin owed something in turn to chivalric love, but the greater debt, if dates are an indication, was the other way. Just as chivalric love elevated its object toward the divine, so mystical love brought the divine down more nearly to the human in the woman Mary. The universality of this worship, combined with the remarkable parallelism in the symbolism of

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<sup>4</sup>J. B. Fletcher's *Religion of Beauty in Woman* analyzes thoroughly Platonic love in the period of the Renaissance. While there is little Platonic theory of love in the Middle Ages, there is a good deal of Platonic feeling—in literature at least; so that the Renaissance does not represent an entirely new attitude toward woman. Therefore Mr. Fletcher's statement that "the Middle Ages, the age of Aristotle, had called woman *confusio hominis*, the 'confusion of man'"; while "the Renaissance, the age of Plato, now hailed her in effect as *illuminatio Dei*, 'the illumination of God,'" cannot be regarded as absolutely accurate.

human and divine love as revealed in the love-literature, compels us to believe that the influence on chivalric love was vital. Every beloved woman, to the truly chivalrous lover, had something of the Mary in her—her beauty, her calm perfection, her unapproachableness, and, less frequently, her kindness.

But the mistress of mediæval romance is not always kind, even to the perfect lover ; and this fact suggests another element, important, but not distinctive enough to be classed with those already discussed. The Middle Ages inherited classical mythology ; they knew Ovid. Haughty Venus and capricious Cupid are everywhere in mediæval literature, and the stream of tendency which they embody or represent entered into chivalric romance, contributing to the perversity of the mistress and encouraging less elevated emotions to become part of chivalric love. The Ovidian tradition, like Neo-Platonism, powerfully affected love allegory. The Platonic and Ovidian elements may be found together, but usually more or less hostile, through the Middle Ages. The Ovidian element, however, is less characteristic.

As stated, chivalric love developed out of mediæval conditions, but love to-day has probably been more profoundly influenced by chivalric ideals than was the love of man and woman in the days of chivalry. The age of chivalry has by no means perpetuated itself ; we belong to a period which prides itself on seeing things as they are, and chivalry does not aid us in doing this. Yet in an age of realism the romantic quest is still a vital part of the lives of many men. The love of man for woman is still a quest for an unattainable and ideal end. Its chief beauty depends on this fact. And the nature of this quest has nowhere been presented more clearly than in mediæval romance.

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